

Townsend City Savings Bank
793 Chapel Street
New Haven County
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-288

HABS
CONN

5. NEWHA

36.

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HABS
CONN
5 NEWHA
36.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-288

TOWNSEND CITY SAVINGS BANK

southwest porch.

~~wide arched opening and grillage of small turned~~

5. Alterations and additions: At the end of the Chinese restaurant tenancy in the 1920's, the central stair and entrance doorway were removed to provide space for a third shop on the ground floor. The only access to the second floor now is a fire escape in the rear.
6. Important old views: 1860 wood engraving by J. W. Orr of New York used on handbill advertisement.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Office of the Tradesman's Bank in 1853; the Townsend City Savings Bank at the end of the same decade. The Townsend Bank in 1864 was the scene of a one million dollar bank robbery, the largest recorded to date in New Haven.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Arnold G. Dana "New Haven Old and New," unpublished scrapbooks in the archives of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut.

2. Secondary and published sources:

The New Haven City Directory, 1840 to 1952 (copies in Yale Library, Public Library, Town Clerk's office, and the New Haven Colony Historical Society Library.

The New Haven Evening Register, 1855 to 1865, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, corner of Wall and High Streets, New Haven, Conn.

Handbill advertisement provided by James Hasse of the First New Haven National Bank, showing facade of Townsend Bank Building as it was in 1860.

Prepared by: Jonathan B. Conant
Research Assistant
National Park Service
September 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A two story, 3 bayed brownstone banking building of Italianate design, the Townsend City Bank has a richly ornamented second-floor principal banking room of monumental scale. The first floor facade has been radically altered.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor. Second floor interior is in very poor condition due to disuse for thirty years and its prior use as a restaurant.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 44'-8" (front) x 76' deep. Facade has three bays composed in three vertical zones and crowned by a balustrade with low pediment over central bay.
2. Foundations: Not determined.
3. Wall construction: Facade is brownstone backed by brick. Rear wall is brick. Central bay and two end pilasters of front are rusticated and project from plane of the two end bays.
4. Framing: Wooden joists supported on brick bearing walls.
5. Chimneys: Not visible from street.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Modern store fronts and doors on the first floor.

1860 wood engraving shows elaborate main entrance doorway framed by massive pilasters decorated with panels and acanthus leaf consoles supporting an arched pediment.
 - b. Windows: At the second floor level paired round-headed windows in end bays are capped by console supported scroll-pedimented cornices. The center bay contains a tall arched niche framed with ornamented surround and

bracketed sill. The third or attic level is expressed in three horizontal panels which are framed with flat surrounds. Center panel, which has narrow frame, is lettered "Bank." Two end panels have palmette ornaments. 1860 handbill shows palmette above center panel also.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Not visible from exterior; appears to be flat.
- b. Cornice and eaves: Above the simple architrave, modillions over a dentil course support a wide cornice which projects over the pilasters and center bay. Center bay has a low-pitched pediment at center. Surmounting cornice is a narrow balustrade consisting of railing and widely spaced exposed brick piers. 1860 advertisement shows ten balusters on each side of central motif.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan:

- a. First floor: The first floor is occupied by three stores running from front to rear. Space occupied by front portion of middle store originally contained a broad stairway leading from street to semi-circular lobby on second floor. Stair well is now floored over.
- b. Second floor: Semi-circular lobby at head of former stairwell leads to main banking room spanning center of building. Banking room measures 25'-2" x 42'-8". Height to top of pilastering is 22'-6". Southeast and southwest front rooms open from curved walls of semi-circular lobby and at present have large openings into central banking room. The rooms behind the banking room have been altered to accommodate the kitchen and rest rooms of the restaurant tenant. Other than the missing stairs, the plan from the banking room forward to the street remains virtually intact.

2. Stairways: The only access to the second floor is by way of an exterior fire escape in the rear.
3. Flooring: Existing floors are of exposed and worn wood, linoleum and tile.
4. Walls and ceilings: Most of the walls are now covered with murals above white tile, remnants of the restaurant decoration. For the most part, ceilings have retained their original treatment. Ceiling at east and west ends of main room is barrel vaulted; center contains coffered dome of very large diameter with large oculus. Transition from vault to dome is accomplished by relatively flat pendentives.
5. Doorways and doors: The large opening between foyer and banking room is monumental in scale. Doors from foyer to front rooms are curved.
6. Decorative features and trim: Ceiling cornice of two front rooms on second floor has inset panel with acanthus ornamented reveals. Painted ceiling in each of these two rooms appears to be original. The cornice is composed of parallel running moldings of egg and dart, acanthus and ovolo, dentils, and acanthus. Half-domed ceiling of lobby is also richly coffered and corniced. Main door has very rich trim and cornice with elaborate Greek Revival cresting. Lower portions of the pilasters of main banking room have been cut away and walls tiled. Wooden baseboards are 18" high with a relatively simple but massive profile. The membering of the 12" wide trim at door jambs is also relatively simple.
7. Notable hardware: None.
8. Lighting: Old electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Radiators: Two fireplaces in front rooms. Southwest room fireplace has round-arched wooden mantelpiece painted grey. In the southeast room the opening has been damaged and mantelpiece is missing.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is on the north side of Chapel Street facing south. This

part of the business section is rapidly becoming run-down. There are many empty stores in the immediate vicinity.

2. Outbuildings: None.
3. Landscaping: A small service yard in the rear which is common to several buildings, is overgrown with weeds and bushes.

Prepared by: Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 12, 1964

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President. The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichy, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.